



*Historical Note and Notice:
The New York Society of
Forensic Sciences
at Lehman College,
City University of New York,
1985 to 1996*

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In the mid-1980s, the New York City Medical Examiner's Office was besieged by a series of scandals and allegations of racism that led, eventually, to the downfall of the chief medical examiner and a loss of public confidence in the medical examiner's system. In April 1985, a group of concerned forensic scientists conceived the idea of creating a non-political, independent, educational organization that would upgrade the standards and practice of the forensic sciences and restore public confidence. On July 16, 1985, the group convened at a restaurant in Bayside, Queens and formed an *ad hoc* committee that would encourage professional excellence through continuing educational programs. The Research Foundation of the City of New York recognized the need for such a group and awarded a research-educational grant to the New York Society of Forensic Sciences (NYSFS) at Lehman College, Bronx, New York, enabling them to sponsor their first program on December 23, 1985.

Over an 11-year period, several hundred persons engaged in a variety of forensic specialties have participated in over 66 out-

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standing programs on timely and controversial national and local forensic issues. The organizational structure of the NYSFS was modeled after the multidisciplinary approach of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences. Annual membership dues were maintained at a nominal rate of \$50 for members and \$25 for students for many years. The minutes of each meeting contained biographical information about the speakers and up-to-date references regarding the topics presented. Buffet dinners were held before the scientific sessions in the congenial faculty dining room on the Lehman College campus so that members and guest speakers could socialize.

Although the organization achieved its goals, interests and attendance at the Wednesday evening meetings faded in recent years. Several attempts were made to rekindle interest, but to no avail. To continue to provide quality educational programs and give forensic scientists a local voice, the NYSFS reached out to the Society of Medical Jurisprudence (SMJ) at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City in March, 1996, to negotiate a merger between the two groups. The SMJ is also a prestigious professional organization, incorporated in 1883. Because the goals and membership of the two groups overlap in many respects, the officers and Board of Trustees of the two societies agreed that it would be in their best future interests to form an alliance. On May 1, 1996, the NYSFS joined the SMJ. Ten meetings per year are now held at Lenox Hill Hospital, located at 77th Street between Lexington and Park Avenues in Manhattan, on Monday evenings starting at 6:30 PM.

Guest speakers, members, and officers helped to make each meeting a success. The officers have been instrumental to the longevity of the organization; they include: President and Founder Mark L. Taff, MD; Vice-President and Executive Director at Lehman College, James V. Taylor, PhD; Secretary Peter R. DeForest, DCrim.; Treasurer, Spencer Jay Turkel, PhD; Members-at-Large Donald B. Hoffman, PhD and Gwen I. Harleman, MD; and Executive Treasurer at Lehman College, Jean L. Bresnahan, PhD, JD; and Corresponding Secretary, Lauren R. Boglioli, MD.

The NYSFS has presented six career achievement awards to

leaders in the forensic sciences in recognition of their outstanding contributions. The recipients were: Dominick DiMaio, MD, Lester Adelson, MD, Werner U. Spitz, MD, John Money, PhD, Vincent Fontana, MD, and Cyril H. Wecht, MD, JD.

It is hoped that the history of the NYSFS will help to stimulate interest in the creation of other forensic educational groups on local levels throughout the United States. In this age of managed health care and medical mergers, the coalition between the NYSFS and SMJ promises to be exciting; forensic scientists in the Greater Metropolitan New York City area are encouraged to participate and enjoy the meetings. For those interested in learning more about the SMJ, please contact the Society at P.O. Box 20678, Cherokee Station, New York, NY 10021-0073; Tel.: (212) 734-0564.